

including by asking the wealthiest Americans to pay a little more, so we can still invest in the things that make our Nation strong, like education and research.

So let's begin by doing what we all agree on. Both parties say we should keep middle class taxes low. The Senate has already passed a bill to keep income taxes from going up on middle class families. Democrats in the House are ready to do the same thing. And if we can just get a few House Republicans on board, I'll sign this bill as soon as Congress sends it my way.

But it's unacceptable for some Republicans in Congress to hold middle class tax cuts hostage simply because they refuse to let tax rates go up on the wealthiest Americans. And if you agree with me, then I could use your help. Let your Congressman know what \$2,000 means to you. Give them a call, write them an e-mail, or

tweet them using the hashtag #My2K. That's "My2K."

You and your family have a lot riding on the outcome of this debate; we all do. And as citizens, we all have a say in the country we want to build, not just on election day, but every day. So make your voice heard. I promise, it makes a difference.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 1:30 p.m. on November 30 on the K'NEX Brands L.P. production floor at the Rodon Group manufacturing facility in Hatfield, PA, for broadcast on December 1. In the address, the President referred to S. 3412. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 30, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on December 1.

Remarks at the Kennedy Center Honors Reception

December 2, 2012

Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you very much. Thank you. Well, good evening, everybody. You all look lovely. *[Laughter]* Welcome to the White House on a night when I am nowhere close to being the main attraction.

Thank you, David Rubenstein, Michael Kaiser and the Kennedy Center Trustees, and everyone who has worked so hard to uphold President Kennedy's commitment to supporting the arts. I also want to recognize another of President Kennedy's amazing legacies, and that is his wonderful daughter Caroline, who is here tonight.

None of this would be possible without the Cochairs of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, George Stevens—where is George, there he is—and his son Michael—where did Michael go, there he is—who have produced the Kennedy Center Honors—they have produced the Kennedy Center Honors for 35 years now.

Tonight we continue a tradition here at the White House by honoring some extraordinary people who have no business being on the same stage together. *[Laughter]* We've got

Buddy Guy sitting next to Dustin Hoffman. *[Laughter]* We've got Dave Letterman alongside one of the greatest ballerinas of all time. I don't think Dave dances. *[Laughter]* All three living members of Led Zeppelin in one place. So this is a remarkable evening.

And it speaks to something that has always made this country great: the idea that here in America, more than any other place on Earth, we are free to follow our own passions, explore our own gifts, wherever they may lead us. And people from all around the world come here to make sure that they too can provide us the incredible gifts that they have.

Tonight's honorees didn't just take up their crafts to make a living. They did it because they couldn't imagine living any other way. And that passion took each of them from humble beginnings to the pinnacle of their profession. And tonight, in the People's House, we have a chance to say thank you.

Growing up as the son of a sharecropper in Louisiana, Buddy Guy made his first guitar out of wires from a window screen. That worked until his parents started wondering how all the

mosquitoes were getting in. [Laughter] But Buddy was hooked, and a few years later, he bought a one-way ticket to Chicago to find his heroes, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. Pretty soon he was broke, hungry, and ready to head home. And then, one night outside a blues club, a man pulled up and handed Buddy a salami sandwich and said, "I'm Mud, and you ain't going nowhere." And that was the start of something special.

Of course, success hasn't changed the humble country boy who used to milk cows on a farm outside of Baton Rouge. Buddy tells a story about his son Greg wanting to learn to play the guitar like Prince. Buddy told him he'd better learn some Jimi Hendrix first. [Laughter] And it was only after watching a TV special on Hendrix that Greg found out Jimi had borrowed some licks from his dad. So Greg said, "I didn't know you could play like that." And Buddy said, "You never asked." [Laughter]

Today, Buddy is still going strong, one of the last guardians of the great American blues. And on a personal note, I will never forget Buddy playing "Sweet Home Chicago" in this very room back in February and him and a few others forcing me to sing along—[laughter]—which was just okay. [Laughter] There aren't too many people who can get me to sing, but Buddy was one of them. And so we are so glad that we can honor him tonight. Congratulations, Buddy Guy.

When "The Graduate" was originally written, the main character was supposed to be Robert Redford, a tall, blond track star. And when Dustin Hoffman auditioned for the part, a crewmember handed him a subway token on his way out, saying, "Here, kid, you're going to need this." [Laughter]

Dustin ended up getting the role, and it launched one of the greatest movie careers of his generation, of any generation. Most actors dream of being in maybe one film that becomes part of our cultural vocabulary. Dustin churned out "Midnight Cowboy," "Tootsie," "Rain Man," "Hook"—not bad for a guy who signed up for his first acting class after a friend

told him, "Nobody flunks acting; it's like gym." [Laughter]

Still, I imagine one secret to his success is his inability to see himself as anything but an underdog. Even after "The Graduate" became a runaway success, Dustin says: "I really believed that was a fluke, and I refused to believe I had arrived. And in a way, I've been hanging on by my fingertips for the entire ride."

Well, Dustin, you'll be glad to know that this award was not supposed to go to Robert Redford. [Laughter] He's already got one. [Laughter] So tonight we honor Dustin Hoffman, an actor who has finally arrived. He's made it. [Applause] He's made it.

If you ask David Letterman what's it like to tape his show, he'll say: "If it's going well, it just lifts you. If it's not going well, it sinks you. It's exhilarating. It's my favorite hour of the day." It's unclear how Dave feels about this hour. It's different when you're not the one with the mike, isn't it, Dave? [Laughter] You're looking a little stressed, aren't you? [Laughter] I'd also point out it's a lot warmer here than it is on Dave's set. [Laughter]

But I've enjoyed my time in the Ed Sullivan Theater. And earlier this year, Dave celebrated his 30th anniversary in late night television, the only person to reach that milestone besides Johnny Carson. Now, Dave will be the first to tell you that he's no Carson, that all his years on television have only made him appreciate even more how unique Johnny was. But that's a good thing, because if he were more like Johnny, he'd be less like Dave.

After all, it was Dave who got his start as an Indianapolis weatherman, once reporting that the city was being pelted by hail "the size of canned hams." [Laughter] It's one of the highlights of his career. [Laughter] It was Dave who strapped a camera to a monkey—[laughter]—worked a Taco Bell drive-through, told Lady Gaga that when he was her age, he had a paper route. [Laughter] It was Dave who came back on the air less than a week after 9/11 to show the world that New York was still standing.

So tonight we honor Dave Letterman, who has always offered us an authentic piece of himself: sometimes cranky, often self-deprecating,

always funny. And those of you who have been on his show know he is also a true gentleman. So thank you, Dave. Thank you. Congratulations.

When Natalia Makarova defected from the Soviet Union in 1970, she made headlines around the globe. But back home, her name was excised from textbooks, her photo expunged from the walls of her school. And for the next 18 years, her countrymen were forced to rely on underground channels to follow the rise of one of the most accomplished ballerinas in the world.

But no one can erase what takes hold of the heart. And in 1989, when the Iron Curtain opened, the Russian people welcomed her back with open arms. Over 2,000 people packed the Kirov Theater where she had trained as a young girl; another 20 people crammed in with the orchestra, all to watch a dancer who never thought she'd be back. It was a fitting end to a career that began when 13-year-old Natalia—completely double jointed and possessed of an incredible gift for musicality and movement—told her parents she did not want to be an engineer, thank you, she wanted to dance.

After hanging up her shoes, Natalia moved to Broadway, where she won a Tony Award. And she remains as humble as ever, once saying: "I'm never proud of what I've done. Sometimes, I'm not ashamed." So thank you, Natalia, for the understatement of the century. [Laughter] Thank you for sharing your talents with all of us. Congratulations.

I worked with the speechwriters; there's no smooth transition from ballet to Led Zeppelin. [Laughter] We were trying to work the "Stairway To Heaven" metaphor, and it didn't work. [Laughter]

So when Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, John Paul Jones, and John Bonham burst onto the musical scene in the late 1960s, the world never saw it coming. There was this singer with a mane like a lion, a voice like a banshee; a guitar prodigy who left people's jaws on the floor; a versatile bassist who was equally at home on the keyboards; a drummer who played like his life depended on it.

And when the Brits initially kept their distance, Led Zeppelin grabbed America from the opening chord. We were ready for what Jimmy called songs with "a lot of light and shade." It's been said that a generation of young people survived teenage angst with a pair of headphones and a Zeppelin album, and a generation of parents wondered what all that noise was about. [Laughter]

But even now, 32 years after John Bonham's passing—and we all, I think, appreciate the fact that the Zeppelin legacy lives on. The last time the band performed together in 2007—perhaps the last time ever, but we don't know—more than 20 million fans from around the world applied for tickets. And what they saw was vintage Zeppelin. No frills, no theatrics, just a few guys who can still make the ladies weak at the knees, and huddled together, following the music. [Laughter]

Of course, these guys also redefined the rock-and-roll lifestyle. We do not have video of this. [Laughter] But there was some hotel rooms trashed and mayhem all around. So it's fitting that we're doing this in a room with windows that are about 3 inches thick—[laughter]—and Secret Service all around. [Laughter] So, guys, just settle down. [Laughter] These paintings are valuable. [Laughter] They look very calm now, though, don't they? [Laughter]

The—it is a tribute to you guys. And tonight we honor Led Zeppelin for making us all feel young and for showing us that some guys who are not completely youthful can still rock.

So we've got Buddy Guy. We've got Dustin Hoffman. We've got David Letterman, Natalia Makarova, Led Zeppelin. Each—[applause]. There you go. Each of us can remember a moment when the people on this stage touched our lives. Maybe they didn't lead us to become performers ourselves. But maybe they inspired us to see things in a new way, to hear things differently, to discover something within us or to appreciate how much beauty there is in the world.

It's that unique power that makes the arts so important. We may not always think about the importance of music or dance or laughter to the life of this Nation, but who would want to imagine America without it? And that's why we cele-

brate artists like the ones here tonight. And that's why, in this season of joy and thanksgiving, they have earned our deepest appreciation.

So congratulations again to tonight's honorees. Thank you all very much. And I look forward to a spectacular evening. Thank you.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Boyko Borisov of Bulgaria December 3, 2012

President Obama. Well, I want to welcome Prime Minister Borisov to the White House and his delegation from Bulgaria. I have to say at the outset that Bulgaria has proven to be one of our most outstanding NATO allies.

Obviously, there are very strong bonds between our two countries, including many Bulgarian Americans in my hometown of Chicago that reminds us of the strong people-to-people relationship between the United States and Bulgaria.

I've had the opportunity to work and discuss issues with the Prime Minister in the past, and he's always been a very effective leader on the world stage. And I think it's important for everybody to know that he's also a black belt in karate, so you should be very careful crossing him. *[Laughter]*

The—we're going to have a lot to discuss during this meeting. But first and foremost, I want to thank the Prime Minister for the strong partnership in NATO. Bulgaria has been a strong supporter of the efforts in Afghanistan, and we'll have the opportunity to touch briefly on the transition that needs to take place there. But I want to thank him and his fellow countrymen for their service and sacrifice.

We've also had excellent cooperation on criminal investigations, law enforcement, counterterrorism. And most recently, I want to thank the Prime Minister for his very diligent investigation of the tragic terrorist attack that killed Israeli civilians in Bulgaria. The security teams in Bulgaria have worked very hard and cooperatively in bringing the perpetrators to justice.

But of course, the relationship is not just based on security issues. Bulgaria is a modernizing country, and I know that the Prime Min-

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:31 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to musician Prince R. Nelson; actor Robert Redford; and musician Stefani J.A. "Lady Gaga" Germanotta.

ister is interested in a range of reforms to create an open and transparent government, to improve trade and commerce between our two countries, as a leader in the Balkans in moving towards further integration with Europe and the rest of the world economy. We've been very impressed with the progress that's been made in Bulgaria, and I'm looking forward to hearing from the Prime Minister how the United States can further assist in those efforts.

So, Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to you. And we look forward to this conversation. The American people send their regards to the people of Bulgaria. And the only thing I have to say is, the weather is not always this good, so you should enjoy some of the sights while you're here as well.

Prime Minister Borisov. Mr. President, it is an honor that you invited us all in the White House.

First of all, I would like to extend my congratulations on your winning the trust again of the American people.

Of course, the fact that you pointed out you are from Chicago, I would like to point out that this is one of the biggest Bulgarian cities; over 150,000 Bulgarians make Chicago their home. And everybody in Bulgaria was deeply moved at your telephone call to express your condolences for the Bulgarian citizen as well as the Israeli nationals who perished in the terrorist act.

I'm very glad that you pointed out that in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, places where—that our soldiers, U.S. and Bulgaria, fight for democracy shoulder to shoulder, that we do have additional topics of mutual interest. And I thank you for the opportunity to lay a wreath today at Arlington National Cemetery